REMARKS

Claims 33-35 remain pending in the present application and new claims 36-38 are added. Claim 33 is amended to more particularly define the invention of the present application. Basis for the amendment is found at page 6, lines 23-25; page 10, lines 14-32; and page 11, lines 18-25. New claims 36-38 find basis at page 13, lines 1-9. No new matter is added.

Rejection under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) over Thompson et al.

Claims 33-35 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as anticipated by Thompson et al. (U.S. Patent no. 6,371,749). Applicants traverse this basis for rejection and respectfully request reconsideration and withdrawal thereof.

The present claims are directed to a method for curing a chemical agent deposited on a multiple component nonwoven fabric, comprising heat treating a multiple component nonwoven fabric comprising a first polymeric component, a second polymeric component and a curable chemical agent, the first polymeric component having a melting point or softening point that is at least 10°C lower than the melting point or softening point of the second polymeric component, by passing a length of said fabric through a tension isolation means to reduce the tension on said fabric in any one direction to between 0 and 52.5 N/m, and heating the nonwoven fabric to a sufficient temperature for a sufficient time to cure said chemical agent, wherein said temperature is greater than about $(T_m - 40)$°C, where T_m is the melting or softening point of the first polymeric component, but less than $(T_m - 10)$°C, while the nonwoven fabric is under such reduced tension.

In contrast, Thompson et al. disclose a method for annealing a nonwoven web which is restrained on a tentering structure (abstract) to impart dimensional stability to the nonwoven web, so as to reduce shrinkage of the web (col. 2, lines 40-50), such that the nonwoven web can be used in a high temperature environment without shrinking (col. 7, lines 1-7). The annealing or heat setting step is conducted at temperatures above the glass transition temperature of the web polymer so as to crystallize the web polymer (col. 3, lines 24-26; and col. 8, lines 5-10). The Thompson et al. process is particularly directed at annealing meltblown webs of poly(ethylene terephthalate) (PET) fibers, which are known to be deposited in the amorphous state (col. 3, lines 53-67).

Thompson et al. fail to disclose or suggest a method for curing a curable chemical agent that has been deposited on their fabrics, and in fact, are completely silent about depositing such curable chemical agents onto their fabrics. Accordingly, the present claims are distinct from the Thompson et al. disclosure, as the claims

require inclusion of a curable chemical agent in the multicomponent nonwoven web. Withdrawal of the rejection is requested on this basis alone.

Further, while Thompson et al. suggest that multiple component polymer fibers can be used to form their fabrics (col. 6, lines 63-67), they are entirely silent as to how to modify their annealing technique to address the presence of a second polymeric component. In fact, Thompson et al. warn against incorporating polymer additives or polymer blends which would reduce the melting point of their webs, because it would negatively impact the use of their webs for high temperature applications (col. 2, lines 51-60). As such, Applicants submit that Thompson et al. is non-enabling as to the presently claimed process, which requires that the multicomponent nonwoven web contain two polymer components that differ in melting or softening point by at least 10°C .

Likewise, Thompson et al. fail to disclose or suggest the use of tension isolation means to reduce the tension on their fabric to between 0 and 52.5 N/m. Notably, while Thompson et al. suggest that their annealing process can be carried out in a continuous process (col. 5, lines 12-29), all of their exemplary data is conducted on a static apparatus (col. 11, lines 31-53). Therefore, Applicants once again submit that Thompson et al. is non-enabling as to a continuous process which utilizes tension isolation means to reduce tension on a moving fabric, and cannot be said to anticipate nor make obvious the present claims.

Withdrawal of the rejection and allowance of the claims is requested.

In view of the foregoing, allowance of the above-referenced application is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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